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Breakdown of governance: A critical analysis of New Zealand's climate change response

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Abstract

This thesis critically analyses the organisation and practice of climate change governance in New Zealand. Grounded in neo-Marxist state theory, the research identifies and deconstructs the political and economic structures that have shaped New Zealand's policy response to climate change from 1988 to 2012. The fourth Labour Government, acting in response to the emergent threat of anthropogenic climate change, initiated New Zealand's Climate Change Programme (NZ CCP). Subsequent governments persevered with the NZ CCP; effecting a relatively continuous pattern of minimal interventionist and least cost policy change. This culminated in late 2008, with the passage of the New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme (NZ ETS) – a comprehensive, all sector economic instrument that would impose a price on domestic greenhouse gases. Despite this policy change, the NZ CCP has failed as an ameliorative response to climate change. Between 1990 and 2012, New Zealand's gross emissions increased by 21 percent. Furthermore, there has been little evidence to suggest that the response has encouraged either afforestation or greater investment in renewable energy. To this point, little progress has been made in decarbonising New Zealand's economy. Using Marxian systems-analysis, the research treats this pattern of policy change as a case study of policy breakdown and dysfunctional governance. The predominant (and ineffectual) mode of governance practiced in New Zealand is argued an outcome of the contradictory structural dynamics of New Zealand's capitalist state. In the first instance, the state is functionally obliged to develop remedial climate change policy in response to the existential threat of climate change. This involves the formulation of policy that directly intervenes in New Zealand's productive sources of greenhouse gas emissions. However, in the second instance, the state is constrained in its policy-making activities by the systemic logic of capital. This precludes the formulation of authoritative interventionist policy capable of effecting behavioural changes in carbon-intensive actors. Moreover, the capitalist biases of New Zealand's climate change response precipitate legitimisation crises, further undermining the state's ability to drive mitigation and adaptation efforts. Policy change wrought between discordant systemic imperatives is invariably subject to policy breakdown. As this dysfunction is structural in nature,

the thesis argues that modern capitalist states cannot practice a meaningful politics of climate change.

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Abbreviations

AAU	Assigned amount units
CER	Certified emissions reduction
CH ₄	Methane
CO ₂	Carbon dioxide
CO ₂ -e	Carbon dioxide equivalent
CP1	Kyoto Protocol first commitment period
CP2	Kyoto Protocol second commitment period
ERU	Emissions reduction unit
EU ETS	European Union Emissions Trading Scheme
GCCR	Global climate change regime
GPC	Greenhouse Policy Coalition
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
MfE	Ministry for the Environment
MOU	Memorandum of understanding
MT	Mega tonne
N ₂ O	Nitrous oxide
NGA	Negotiated greenhouse agreement
NZ CCP	New Zealand Climate Change Programme
NZ ETS	New Zealand Emissions Trading Scheme
NZU	New Zealand Unit
ppb	parts per billion
ppm	parts per million
PRE	Projects to reduce emissions
RMA	Resource Management Act

RMU	Removal unit
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
VA	Voluntary agreement
WMO	World Meteorological Organisation